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**Misuse of Smoking Materials Caused Fatal Methuen Fire**  
*Third Fatal Fire in a Month Caused by Smoking*

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan and Methuen Fire Chief Kenneth F. Bourassa announced the cause of the May 18, 2005 fatal fire at 223 Hampshire Street in Methuen. Investigators have determined the cause to be misuse of smoking materials and that the fire started in the first floor den. The fire took the life of 56-year old Charles "Tom" Craven who was the only person home at the time of the fire.

The fire was jointly investigated by the Methuen Fire Department, Methuen Police Department, State Police investigators assigned to the Office of the State Fire Marshal and the Essex County District Attorney's Office. Technical assistance was received from electrical experts.

Coan said, "This is the third fatal fire in a month caused by the misuse of smoking materials. Smoking has been the leading cause of fatal fires as far back as World War II and last year caused 30% of residential fire deaths."

He added, "As State Fire Marshal I urge the Legislature to act upon the 'fire-safe' cigarette bill currently before them to help prevent these types of tragedies."

Coan added, "We want smokers to live long enough to quit."

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